



**TESTIMONY ON OREGON HEALTH AUTHORITY BUDGET HB 5026
JOINT WAYS & MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
SUBMITTED BY PHILLIP KENNEDY-WONG
MARCH 8, 2017**

Oregon Food Bank requests fully funding the Farm Direct Nutrition Program at \$3.3 million for WIC families and \$434,000 for eligible low-income seniors. The program provides coupons and vouchers redeemable at farmers markets and roadside stands, going back in to the economy and supporting Oregon farmers.

Oregon has a hunger crisis. Despite 50 consecutive months of job growth, Oregon had the highest rate spike in hunger in the nation over the last three years. Oregon's food insecurity rate is 16.1 percent as compared to the national average of 13.7 percent.¹

Our state cannot afford the long term financial and social costs of cutting food assistance programs at a time when hunger is rising. In fact, Oregon needs to be bold in its investment in food assistance programs especially ones that serve vulnerable populations like seniors, pregnant women, and children. With congressional cuts expected, Oregon cannot rely on federal food programs alone to fight hunger. We need a diversified portfolio of tools to be successful.

The Governor's Recommended Budget for 2017-19 is just \$260,000 for the Farm Direct Nutrition Program, discontinuing \$300,000 in one-time funds from the 2015-17 biennium. If adopted, there will be fewer seniors and WIC participants able access to fresh and healthy Oregon produce. The amount of individuals losing benefits would be enough to overfill Gil Coliseum in Corvallis!

Divesting in the food programs while hunger is on the rise is not a recipe for economic and social progress nor is it a wise budget decision. This is why the Legislature must prioritize services like the Farm Direct Nutrition in the Public Health Division in the Oregon Health Authority.

Please make a difference to 100,000 mothers and their children in the WIC program and 45,000 seniors by fully funding the Farm Direct Nutrition Program.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Food Insecurity in Oregon: Considering the Role of Housing. Oregon State University School of Public Policy and the Rural Studies Program. October 2016

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